

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Spruce-fir moss spider

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Our two-year old daughter has picked up a fascination with spiders, stemming from, as near as we can interpret, a bad dream involving the 8-legged creatures. Perhaps a little odd, since to our knowledge she's never had a negative interaction with the animals, but now she takes the time to call attention to any spider webs she comes across and pauses and stares curiously at any spiders she finds.

Chances are she'll never come across the world's smallest tarantula, which makes its home in the Southern Appalachians. The spruce-fir moss spider comes in about the size of a pencil eraser, and would be nearly impossible to find even if you were looking. It's an endangered species, found only in tiny pockets of habitat scattered across our mountains.

As its name implies, the spruce fir moss spider is found in moss patches that grow beneath the spruce and fir forest found on the tops of our highest mountains. Due to its reliance on this cold, moist environment, it's but one of our mountain species whose future is thrown into greater doubt due to climate change. The fog, rain and snow that keeps these mountain tops moist is likely to become more erratic due to climate change, and if temperatures warm it could cast the future of cold-weather trees like red spruce and Fraser fir into doubt.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peebles.